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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KINSHASA 001217

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [CG](#) [MONUC](#)

SUBJECT: PLAYING THE TROOP NUMBERS GAME

REF: KINSHASA 1131

Classified By: Poloff Meghan Moore for Reasons 1.5 B and D

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Government and rebel groups in the east are prone to inflate the number of troops they deploy, but clearly there is a build-up of troops going on in the east. As of July 1, the FARDC probably has about 14,000 regular soldiers in eastern Congo, including MLC components. These forces appear to be mobilizing for an attack against Nkunda's positions in Kalehe and Minova (in the northern part of S. Kivu province). Possible total rebel forces (troops loyal to Nkunda and possibly local defense forces loyal to Serufuli and some ex-ANC troops nominally loyal to Obed) are estimated at 6,000-11,000. On June 21, dissident commander Mutebusi and about 300 armed troops crossed from Kamanyola into Rwanda, where they were taken into custody and disarmed by Rwandan authorities. FDLR, Mai Mai, ex-ANC (RCD/G military wing) troops in Goma and possible external involvement from Rwanda, along with ongoing rebel recruiting are largely unquantifiable wildcards. END SUMMARY.

S.Kivu Update

12. (C) On June 21, Mutebusi and about 300 armed troops crossed from Kamanyola into Rwanda, where they were taken into custody and disarmed by Rwandan authorities. Their current official status and what will happen to them next are unknown; the GOR is making no effort to restrain their movements nor to feed them. As of July 1, the area around Kamanyola appeared calm and was under the control of the FARDC and associated Mai Mai. Mutebusi's withdrawal to Rwanda and his subsequent disarming are positive developments. There are unconfirmed reports of speedboats landing at Kalehe, however, and some S. Kivu residents believe that Mutebusi's 'flight' was a trick to allow him to transit to Rwanda to join fellow dissident General Laurent Nkunda in the area of Kalehe or Minova, in northern South Kivu. There were unconfirmed reports that rebel forces reinforced troops in Nyabibwe via Numbi (these two villages are located between Minova and Kalehe) with the aim of attacking Government troops deployed to Kalehe. It is likely that the FARDC commander in the area of Kalehe/Minova exercises very little control over his troops (ex-ANC troops who until recently were part of N. Kivu's military region).

N. Kivu Update

13. (SBU) Goma remains relatively calm for the moment, but civil society reports suspicious boat traffic on Lake Kivu and alleges that Jerome Kakwavu Bukande, leader of the Armed Forces of the Congolese People (FAPC) currently based in the Ituri towns of Aru and Mahagi, and Nkunda may be working together. (Note: Rumors of Jerome and Nkunda have been circulating for some time, including an unconfirmed report that the two met in Kampala. End note.) Nkunda's exact whereabouts are unknown, but he appears to move freely in N. Kivu and has been seen in both Minova and Rutshuru in the past several days. In late June, MONUC military sources reported fighting in and around Walikale between two battalions of Mai Mai (about 1000 troops) who were sent by BG Padiri from the Orientale Military Region and ex-ANC soldiers who appear to be loyal to N. Kivu Military Commander BG Obed. On June 21, a MONUC military source reported attacks by the Interahamwe in Virunga Park.

The Numbers Game

(Note: All numbers are estimates, based mostly on information from MONUC and MOD sources. End Note.)

14. (C) As of July 1, the FARDC probably has about 14,000 regular soldiers in eastern Congo, including 2,900 FARDC troops MONUC military sources reported had moved from Mbandaka between June 16 and June 25. However, the MOD reports that the 3,000 soldiers in the Ituri Brigade who are still in Kisangani will not be moved. Most troops transited the Bangoka airport in Kisangani en route to other cities in eastern DRC. The garrisons at Beni, Kisangani, Kindu and Kalemie have about 2,000 soldiers each, and Bukavu has about 1,500. This estimate includes about 5,000 soldiers sent east by the MLC. It does not include the possible involvement of up to 4-5,000 Mai Mai; should they decide to involve themselves on the government's side (or take sides at all), that would push the total number of potential pro-government combatants to nearly 20,000. (Note: In trying to determine

exact government field strength it is important to keep in mind the Congolese military tradition of exaggerating - and sometimes doubling - numbers. DAO estimates about 14,000 total pro-GDRC forces in eastern Congo, to include 2 battalions of Mai Mai at Walikale. End Note.) Troop discipline for all groups (with the possible exception of the GSSP) continues to be a serious problem. Although the FARDC did send foodstuffs, uniforms, and equipment with some troops, its track record in terms of ongoing troop support is very poor.

Breakdown of Government forces

15. (C) Since early June, the government has moved troops, cash, supplies, weapons and ammunition eastward via commercial, private and MLC airplanes. From June 16-25, 2,900 FARDC troops left Mbandaka, Equateur for the east. They have also been deployed from Kinshasa, Western Kasai, and may be gearing up to move out of Gbadolite. FARDC troop movements in S. Kivu, Maniema and Katanga continue. The GDRC has sped up formal integration of Mai Mai elements in Katanga.

S. Kivu: About 1,500 FARDC soldiers// 2,000 Mai Mai

N. Kivu: About 2,000 FARDC soldiers
Maniema: About 2,000 FARDC soldiers// 1,000 Mai Mai

N. Katanga: About 2,000 FARDC soldiers// 1,000 Mai Mai

Orientale: About 2,000 FARDC soldiers

Rebel Numbers

16. (C) Total Rebel Estimated Forces: POSSIBLE (and we emphasize this) 6,000) 11,000

S. Kivu: 2,000 troops loyal to Nkunda

N. Kivu: 2,000 ex-ANC troops//5,000 Governor Serufuli's Local Defense Force

Maniema: 100-500 ex-ANC troops

N. Katanga: 100-500 ex-ANC troops

Orientale: 100-500 ex-ANC troops

FDLR Numbers

17. (U) As of January 2004, MONUC estimated FDLR strength at 6-7,000 in N. Kivu and 6,000 in S. Kivu.

The Wildcards

FDLR

18. (SBU) FDLR troops in N. and S. Kivu have remained suspiciously quiet throughout the recent buildup. There are limited reports of Mai Mai/ FDLR collaboration in S. and N. Kivu, but no reports of FDLR massing at the border or mobilizing for any military operations. It was widely reported that a small number of FDLR worked with Mai Mai in the Kamanyola campaign. Although there are a large number of FDLR elements in N. Kivu, their current activities and loyalties are completely unknown.

Mai Mai

19. (SBU) Mai Mai units' quality and reliability depend on the quality and interests of their commanders. They tend to have local interests and concerns, bad equipment, little training, and no discipline. In addition, certain commanders continue to work very closely with their former FDLR allies.

Rebel Recruiting

10. (SBU) Nkunda has been recruiting in N. Kivu and in refugee camps, which makes it difficult to pin down his numbers. Human rights sources have reported recruitment at the Cyangugu refugee camp. The new recruits were reportedly being sent to Butare Training Camp in Rwanda. In addition, UNHCR reports that things in the camp are 'not normal,' UNHCR has limited control, and some Banyamulenge refugees who wished to return were not allowed to return by extremist elements within the camp. Nkunda has also visited at least one camp in Rwanda for unknown purposes, and the whereabouts of the 157 troops loyal to Mutebusi (including 12 officers) who were brought to the Cyangugu Transit Center June 8 is unknown. MONUC Child Protection sources report that certain Mai Mai groups and troops loyal to Nkunda and Mutebusi have forcibly recruited children. At the same time, some FARDC units in Katanga and Equateur have demobilized children before deploying.

Comment

11. (C) In the midst of a very fluid and unclear situation, trying to figure out who has what support where and how solidly they might be committed to the mission is extremely problematic. What this exercise does demonstrate, however, is that this is the most significant movement of government forces (and allied elements) to and within the East in almost two years. We remain concerned that despite professed good intentions of avoiding war, having this many poorly trained troops in a relatively small area during this tense period could all too easily lead to a confrontation.

HOOKS